



**North/West Lower  
Michigan Synod**

**2900 N. Waverly Rd.  
Lansing, MI 48906**

**517-321-5066  
[mittensynod.org](http://mittensynod.org)**

## **In this Issue:**

Stating the Obvious

Celebrating Black History Month

Community Reset

Upcoming Events

Congregations in Transition

## **Stating the Obvious: Pastoral Care in the Pandemic**

Which COVID-19 universe do you live in? Are you seeing the decline in the number of deaths, hospitalizations, and new cases; securing your vaccine; and set to return to in-person worship on Ash Wednesday? Or, are you scared of the more contagious strains of the virus; sad after reading the obituary of a nine year-old killed by COVID-19; and settling in for the most perilous part of the pandemic?

How do we provide pastoral or Christian care in such a complex situation? I asked chaplains in our Synod and I'm happy to synthesize what they shared. Some cautioned that there is no substitute for action or reflection with a supervisor for improving our pastoral care. I agree. Recall or ask your pastor about doing verbatims in CPE. Nevertheless, for years, I benefited from returning to Thomas Oden's *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. So reading is not completely without merit!

Communication is key in pastoral care, especially during the pandemic. This is a nice way of saying we need to state the obvious. Sometimes, desiring to be nice and to avoid conflict, we deny, ignore, or overlook concerning symptoms or behaviors. Sometimes we assume everyone else sees what we see. We might be right, and everyone, including the person who needs help, might be waiting for someone to say out loud what everyone sees. Perhaps pastoral care givers are in a unique position to lovingly share what they observe and accompany people in ways their family and friends cannot.

Stating the obvious: Don't overstate your pastoral care skills, to yourself or to anyone else. This advice is always wise; however, it is especially important during the pandemic. Fear, stress, anxiety, isolation, grief, and uncertainty, all both chronic and acute these days, challenge mental and emotional health. The best pastoral care may be to help someone connect with a mental health professional. I was taught that, if a pastor could not resolve the situation with a person in three sessions, it was time to refer them to someone with more expertise.

Stating the obvious: Continue to learn. Like any skill, pastoral care takes practice, reflection, and evaluation. Reviewing basic skills is a way of correcting bad habits. Learning more about a topic with which one is dealing provides confidence and a measure of proficiency. I am pleased that our ELMM program is pursuing a track in pastoral care taught by a retired seminary professor. Our hope is to enhance care and visitation especially in congregations without a called pastor. While ELMM is designed for laypeople, I learned by attending courses on the gospels and hope to be re-centered by this class. Perhaps other pastors will too. If you desire more information, please contact Rebecca Bossenbroek ([administrator@elmm.org](mailto:administrator@elmm.org)).

Stating the obvious: The pandemic is a unique time. What are people's pastoral care concerns and needs during the pandemic or this phase of the pandemic? What signs or symptoms are pastors observing that they need to be attentive to? What concerns and needs do parishioners need to make certain their pastor knows about?

**Continued on page 2**

**Continued from page 1**

Stating the obvious: Change our pastoral care practice to accommodate the pandemic. For example, the inability to visit people in their homes does not mean that pastors cannot visit. We can make phone calls, send notes, cards, and e-cards, and text prayers. Some pastors need to cultivate the ability to provide pastoral care over Zoom or the telephone. For example, include the request to pray *with* during every phone call with a parishioner, then pray. Yes, this takes getting used to; it is also very rewarding. Some pastors and congregations need to come up with a consistent plan to respond to the inability to offer the kind of in-person post-funeral support we often do through visitation.

Stating the obvious: Pastors have seen some congregants at their worst. I suspect congregants have seen some pastors at their worst. I have been involved with pastors and congregations deeply divided over responding to the pandemic and the election. One pastor used the word "reactivity" to describe the experience with some parishioners. After seeing each other at their worst, how do pastors and parishioners start again? We have pastors that resigned or retired or were voted out. My hunch is, when the pandemic is over, some pastors will seek new calls and some parishioners will seek new church homes.

I wonder if the pastoral way of approaching this reality that is less "reactive" is to make learning and practicing forgiveness our Lenten discipline. Contemplating the cross persuades us that forgiveness is costly; forgiveness is not easy. Forgiveness is not instantaneous; rather forgiveness is a process. One understanding of this process names four steps: contrition (feeling regret and remorse), confession (naming honestly what we have done or failed to do to someone else), satisfaction (doing something to make amends), and absolution (forgiveness). While God does not require this process, but forgives us for Christ's sake, sometimes individuals and communities, including congregations, need this process to start again. Perhaps Lent during a pandemic can be a time of self-examination for the ways we have offended (as opposed to our human tendency to examine the ways we have been offended) that leads us into a process of forgiveness that will allow us to start again.

Stating the obvious: If you need pastoral care, seek pastoral care. If you are not sure, ask people you trust for their honest assessment. When I first became bishop, I said that every pastor (and every pastor's family) needs a pastor; I asked pastors to let me know who their pastor is. That was, I guess, the first controversial statement I made. I pray we all have someone we can call when we have pastoral needs. Rosanne, David, and I are here to help, whether by listening and praying pastorally (with the caveat that we are entrusted with multiple roles with pastors and deacons) or by connecting you with a pastor. Rostered ministers are very fortunate because Portico provides six sessions with a therapist at no cost as a benefit.

Stating the obvious: Jesus overcomes all division, including the division brought on by COVID-19. Whatever COVID-19 universe you are living in, we are united in Christ. Empowered by Jesus' love, we care for one another and dare to move forward together.

Have a holy Lent!

The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop

## Celebrating Black History Month

*As we continue to live amidst a year of pandemic and much unrest in our nation, it is significant for us to pause and remember that February is dedicated to celebrating Black History. In light of so much racial unrest, the killing of so many black people and the Black Lives Matter movement, this month affords us another opportunity to remember and reflect on those Black Americans who have not been recognized for their contributions to our society, our country and our world. Sometimes we forget the significance of history and particularly Black history.*

*I invite you to read the following article written by Rev. Kenneth Wheeler. It was originally published on February 7, 2014 and republished on [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org) on February 9, 2021.*

### The Value of All Stories

By Rev. Kenneth Wheeler

African American history month grew out of a great absence of the fullness of the contributions of African Americans to this nation and the world.

The great educator, scholar and historian Carter G. Woodson devoted his life to the study of Black history, and in 1926 began the observance of Negro History Week, which would take place the second week of February. The dates were chosen to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas.

The week-long observance would eventually grow to include the entire month. This month-long observance is important. It is important for African American people because it is critical in helping our children and our people to know that there has been greatness in our history.

In spite of the burden of slavery and the sordid history of segregation, our people managed to rise above those challenges and produce inventors, scientists, writers, scholars, musicians, journalists, actors, theologians and entrepreneurs.

I often hear the question: Why do we need this observance when we are all Americans? My answer: Because there still is an inadequate representation of the contributions of African Americans to the life of American history. And when we are shown it, it is often as one-dimensional people. Additionally, as an African American child if you never know from whence you came — you will never know who you are.

If you never see people who look like you or never realize that there are people who look like you—who wear your color and who have made significant contributions to the life of this great nation and the world—you live your life believing that you can never achieve greatness.

When I think back to my own education, I was first introduced to the richness of Black history by a teacher I had in high school. I'm not sure if this was a part of the regular curricula that was sanctioned by the state of Mississippi at the time (1968) or if it was something that grew out of his own passion and that he felt it was crucial for us to know as Black students and Black people. He taught political science, but he demanded that we read the book *Before the Mayflower* by historian Lerone Bennett Jr. It was a primer and it still is for anyone who wants to study the history of Blacks in this country.

But this month is equally important for White people. It provides them with the opportunity to engage the history of Blacks in a much more comprehensive way. Frederick Douglas—who rose from the position of a slave to become a publisher, an ambassador and an advisor to a president—once said that the history of Blacks and Whites is tied together by the circumstance of history.

In so many ways our history together has been and continues to be one of both pain and challenge. The great burden that we still labor under in America is the burden of race. The reality is that our history was an incomplete one and remains so to a large degree because the American story never valued the story of citizens of color in the same way that it valued the story and the history of White people. The promise of valuing all stories is that it makes us a richer nation, a more complete people.

**Continued on page 4**

**Continued from page 3**

Our history in America is like that of patches that make a quilt. Every one of those patches has a story behind it. History is a gift. This month of February is a gift not just to African Americans but to all Americans. It is important that we commit ourselves to learning from these great stories, these lives that speak to all of us—not only those voices that are contemporaneous to us, but also those voices that speak from the distance. Every one of us here is a human being. We have been shaped by different things. We may have ended up in America under very different circumstances.

Every story, every history—the good and the bad—is worth sharing. The telling humanizes us. There is promise in the telling, that we can be better than we have been.

*Rev. Kenneth Wheeler is a retired ELCA pastor. He served as an assistant to the bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the ELCA for 18 years. For more articles by Rev. Wheeler, visit [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org).*

*If you're looking for more resources on Black History Month, we invite you to visit the ELCA website ([elca.org](http://elca.org)). If you are a parent or grandparent eager to further a young person's understanding of history that includes the richness of Black History, Amazon has an amazing list of books focusing on Black History for all age levels. If you are interested in films that address Black History Month and racial justice, Netflix and Amazon Prime both feature Black History Month releases this month.*

Rev. Rosanne M. Anderson  
Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Candidacy



"I submit to you that human goodwill is the greatest power available to [humanity]."

REV. NELSON W. TROUT

Rev. Nelson W. Trout was a pastor, mentor, and powerful preacher. He became the first African American U.S. Lutheran bishop when he was elected bishop of the South Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church, which later became the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA.

**As we celebrate Black History Month, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod is lifting up Black leaders in the ELCA and larger Christian Church.**



"Disrupting and resisting the systems that dehumanize and oppress the most vulnerable within society is the work of followers of Christ."

JUDITH ROBERTS

Judith Roberts is the Senior Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the ELCA. Prior to that, she served as Director of Racial Justice at the ELCA for the last 10 years.

**We invite you to learn more about these leaders and their important work. Follow us on Facebook ([facebook.com/MittenSynodELCA](https://facebook.com/MittenSynodELCA)) to learn about a new leader each week in February!**

## Community Reset

We know how important it is for a congregation to be a vital partner in the community it serves. It is what God calls us to do. It is what Jesus demonstrates in his ministry. It is what he sends the disciples out to do. History has given us a unique opportunity to affirm that commitment and build on it or have a reset moment to make it a priority.

There was a recent editorial in the newspaper (yes, I still read a newspaper), which highlighted how we can dedicate ourselves to rebuilding our community when we emerge from the pandemic. The author encouraged ordering food from local restaurants, buying locally, and using local building tradespeople. When we emerge from this pandemic, congregations will have a unique opportunity to participate in the rebuilding of their communities.

Once the pandemic subsides, there will be a strong desire to rebuild relationships, community activities, sports, and charities. Congregations can be partners in this rebuilding. If a congregation assisted the community during the pandemic, it will give an opportunity to build on that work. If a congregation has lost sight of community engagement during the pandemic, it provides a unique opportunity for a reset or a new beginning.

There is much conversation right now in congregations about rebuilding the church community. A desire for the fellowship around the communion table and around the coffee pot. I am sure that will happen when the pandemic subsides and restrictions on gatherings from the CDC and the State Health Department are lifted. And there will be a desire to stop there. "Let's get back together like it was!" But the church is a community partner. Our calling is to be sent out. Sent out into the community with Good News.

While we are still in the midst of the pandemic, congregations can start to have conversations and brainstorm how they will support and renew the rebuilding of their communities once the pandemic is over. Maybe your congregation could host community events, participate in community celebrations, assist those people who have fallen through the cracks during the pandemic or seek out the marginalized who have always been out of sight and mind in the community. Once the pandemic subsides, how can you be out in your community and walk alongside of your neighbors and friends in the name of Jesus?

The Rev. David E. Sprang  
Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission

## Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry

Registration is open for Equipping Leaders for Mission and Ministry (ELMM)'s next winter course:

### **The Letters of Paul, February 26-27, 2021 with Professor Wally Taylor**

In his letters and in his personal witness the Apostle Paul gave the early church—and us—the theological grounding that is still the foundation of what we believe and teach about Jesus. His language about the cross, justification, baptism, and resurrection was at the heart of his ministry, of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and is at the center of the Lutheran Church today.

Registration information is available on the ELMM website: <https://elmm.org/events>

## North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2021 Synod Assembly



### Synod Assembly 2021

Given the ongoing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, many events continue to be held differently than in past years. For the 2021 Synod Assembly, Synod Council has approved a virtual assembly, which will be held on May 15, 2021 via Zoom.

Due to its virtual nature, this year's Synod Assembly will be primarily business focused. Therefore, only voting members will be able to register for and participate in the Zoom meeting. All non-voting members and visitors are invited to watch the Synod Assembly via livestream on social media.

In the coming months, updates and resources will be posted on the Synod Assembly page of the Synod website:

<https://mittensynod.org/events/assembly>

### Registration

Registration will be opening soon! Given the nature of this year's Synod Assembly, only voting members will be able to register. All non-voting members and visitors are invited to watch the Synod Assembly via livestream on social media. Registration forms must be completed online and submitted by April 21, 2021. There will be no late registration.

Given the technological nature of this Synod Assembly, voting members should be comfortable using computers, mobile devices, and/or tablets, learning and using applications, and accessing information from websites. Additionally, each voting member will need their own email address and voting device (smartphone or tablet). They will also need access to a computer to participate in the Zoom meeting. It is recommended that voting members use a computer to host the Zoom meeting and use a smartphone or tablet as their voting device.

### Memorials and Resolutions

To be considered for the 2021 Synod Assembly, resolutions and memorials must be submitted to the North/West Lower Michigan (NWL) Synod Resolutions Committee. All resolutions and memorials must be submitted electronically to Ann Stavros at the Synod Office ([annstavros@mittensynod.org](mailto:annstavros@mittensynod.org)) by April 7, 2021.

Resolutions and memorials may only be submitted by a voting member of the upcoming Synod Assembly, a member of a NWLM Synod congregation, a member of a NWLM Synod committee, or a member of an agency of the NWLM Synod. Each proposed resolution and memorial is required to include the names of at least 25 confirmed members of the Synod who support consideration of the proposed document by the upcoming Synod Assembly.

A resolutions and memorials worksheet and guidelines document is available on the Assembly page of the Synod website (<https://mittensynod.org/events/assembly>). For additional guidance in drafting resolutions and memorials, authors are encouraged to contact the Synod Resolutions Committee via its chair, The Rev. Justin J. Walker, at [pastorjustin@clcwyo.org](mailto:pastorjustin@clcwyo.org). Resources are also available at [www.elca.org/documents](http://www.elca.org/documents) (search for "Resolutions").

### Video Submissions

Synod ministries, synod tables, and synod committees are welcome to submit a short video to be considered for the Synod Assembly. Each group may submit one video that is one-two minutes in length. Videos should feature the work of the ministry, table, or committee. Given the business focus and time considerations of this year's Synod Assembly, submitted videos are not guaranteed to be shown during Assembly. All videos will be released via social media after Synod Assembly. To be considered, all videos must be submitted to Pastor David Sprang ([davidsprang@mittensynod.org](mailto:davidsprang@mittensynod.org)) by April 7, 2021.

## Reflections on Climate Change, Conviction, and Courage

By Rev. John Schleicher

*More than half of the carbon humanity has exhaled into the atmosphere in its entire history has been emitted in just the past three decades; since the end of World War II, the figure is 85%.*

David Wallace-Wells, "The Uninhabitable Earth," 7/9/2017

Our synod's Environmental Stewardship Task Force (ESTF) has been reading and reflecting on the book *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* by Jim Antal. Jim is the spokesperson on climate change for the United Church of Christ. We pray that the following excerpts from this book may add depth and direction to your Lenten discipline:

*It's the spiritual discipline of gratitude that allows me to take in and process the reports – new each day – of the ways we are destroying God's great gift of creation. Only by renewing my connection with the God of Love—many times each day—am I able to face the ways our generation continues to reverse Genesis, de-creating the living world and unraveling the web of life.*

*I join Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis in recognizing that God is calling for nothing short of "a change of humanity" in which we "replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing." We must "learn to give, and not simply give up..."*

*With God at our side, we experience an expanded capacity to absorb the horror of what we have done and what we are doing to life itself. All of that prepares us for the miracle of faithfulness amidst discontinuity. God does not abandon us in our despair. Quite the contrary. The more deeply we take in the lifelessness of drought and clearcutting, the choking exhaustion of heat waves, the helplessness of rising waters, the loneliness of extinction, the more receptive we are to miracle. Nothing we have done—nothing we can do—can extinguish the Holy Spirit who breathes into us renewed conviction and fresh courage that nothing can take away.*

*Inspired by the Spirit, we will take action by engaging the powers and principalities, whoever they may be. We will do so, not because we expect victory, but because – in our deepest places – we are connected to a loving God and can do no other.*

Pp.34-35

## Seminary Debt Reduction Assistance Program

According to Luther Seminary, the average seminary student indebtedness is \$62,000. Unlike other professions, it is more challenging for pastors and deacons to repay their student loans because of the compensation pastors and deacons receive. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is working to address the burden of seminary education debt born by many of our rostered ministers by annually awarding \$2000 grants.

Applications for this year's grants are available! These grants are open to rostered ministers within 15 years of their ordination. Grants are sent directly to lending institutions for educational debt to be applied to the principal of a rostered minister's seminary student loans.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is grateful for the contributions we have received so far and are confident that we will be able to award three grants this year.

All applications must be received by February 28, 2021.

Learn More and Apply: <http://bit.ly/3jJNWbu>

### Synod Finances

Unrestricted-Undesignated Fund	December	Year to Date
Beginning Fund Balance	187,088	155,747
Mission Support Revenue	136,163	1,307,159
Other Revenue	1,978	58,485
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>138,141</b>	<b>1,365,645</b>
Churchwide Proportionate Share (50%)	68,082	653,580
Other Expenses	50,159	660,824
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>118,241</b>	<b>1,314,403</b>
Net Change to Fund Balance (Revenue - Expenses)	19,900	51,241
Ending Balance	206,988	206,988
<b>Other Fund Balances</b>		
Unrestricted-Designated Funds		654,180
Endowment-related Temporarily-restricted Funds		807,033
Temporarily-restricted Funds		368,691
Permanently-restricted Funds		924,639
<b>Total Other Fund Balances</b>		<b>2,754,542</b>
<b>Total - All Funds (as of 1/31/21)</b>		<b>2,961,531</b>

### Year-End Audits

Thanks to the congregations who have completed and provided the ***Certification of Financial Compliance Review of Congregation Records***. This annual exercise helps congregations comply with generally accepted accounting principles, prevent fraud (unfortunately, fraud happens in small non-profit organizations, even religious organizations), and fosters a team effort in terms of stewarding the congregation's resources.

The Synod undergoes an annual audit performed by a CPA firm who specializes in working with non-profit organizations. One of the first items they must complete is confirmation of our mission support revenue. A sampling of congregations will receive a letter on synod letterhead requesting confirmation of mission support revenue received Feb 2020 – Jan 2021.

We appreciate your prompt attention to these requests, because for those congregations who do not respond, we must pull copies of your checks to verify our revenue figures with our auditor. In short, we spend less time and money on the audit if these responses are provided promptly. We thank you for your cooperation!

### Mission Support Statement of Intent

Congregations are better able to exercise faithful stewardship when they receive financial support commitments from members and regular attendees. The information helps the leaders plan well in terms of funding ministry in their community.

Likewise, synods are dependent on *Mission Support Statements of Intent* from congregations to plan well for the year's activity. Thank you to all who have already submitted their 2021 Intent Forms. This information also helps us provide a more accurate to the Churchwide office so they can plan well.

Our synod forwards 50% of mission support revenue to our Churchwide office to fund ELCA ministries throughout our denomination and around the world. The better our estimate of revenue from congregations, the better our estimate of support to the Churchwide office.

### Synod Staff Video Sermons for Weekly Worship

For the foreseeable future, Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and Pastor David Sprang will be recording sermons for congregations to use as part of their weekly virtual worship services.

Rostered Ministers are invited to sign up to receive the sermons in advance on Wednesday afternoons. These sermons are then released to the general public on Sunday afternoons.

Sign-up: <https://bit.ly/3hnZd7A>

### Coronavirus Resources

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website.

With partnership and support from the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, the ELCA Federal Credit Union (FCU) is now offering the second round of Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loans to congregations and ministries. To review eligibility requirements and apply for a PPP loan, please visit the ELCA FCU's website, [www.elcafcu.org/PPP](http://www.elcafcu.org/PPP)

On January 22, The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services extended its epidemic order requiring masks and limiting some indoor gatherings. Bishop Satterlee continues to recommend the suspension of indoor in-person worship.

View all resources: <https://bit.ly/2MPx4to>

### Annual Rostered Minister Reports

2020 Annual Rostered Minister Report forms are now available! All rostered ministers are expected to complete and return a report to Bishop Satterlee. To complete the annual report form, please download the appropriate form and save it to your computer before completing it. Once completed, please email the report to Bishop Satterlee at [bishopcraigsatterlee@mittensynod.org](mailto:bishopcraigsatterlee@mittensynod.org).

Download Forms: <http://bit.ly/38HxIEU>

### Upcoming Events

February 18	Ignite the Church Conference	Online	<a href="https://www.ignitethechurch.net">https://www.ignitethechurch.net</a>
February 26-27	ELMM: The Letters of Paul	Zoom	<a href="https://elmm.org">https://elmm.org</a>
March 5-6	Region 6 Explore Ministry Event	Zoom	<a href="http://bit.ly/3dbxUz0">http://bit.ly/3dbxUz0</a>
March 18	Ignite the Church Conference	Online	<a href="https://www.ignitethechurch.net">https://www.ignitethechurch.net</a>

**Due to the current government restrictions and recommendations on in-person gatherings, many upcoming events have been cancelled, postponed, or moved to a virtual event. Please check with the event's organizer.**

## Congregations in Transition

Note: We include congregations on the public list when the called pastor or rostered leader completes her or his ministry in the congregation. Thus, congregations in which the pastor has resigned but is still serving are not listed here. We also do not post calls that are accepted until Bishop Satterlee signs the Letter of Call.

Currently, there are no active open calls in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod.

<b>Bay Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean</b>	<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Dean</b>
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
		<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean</b>